11: Hartmann M-5 (ca. 1928) 1928 FL11 Luo FL11

Some Customs of the Luwo (or Nilotic Kavirondo) living in South Kavirondo.

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Birth.

The Luwo people live together with their families in kraals. These families consist of the owner of the village with his wives, and his sons with their respective wives and children, and the owner's unmarried daughters.

Each wife has her own hut. The husband spends most of his time in the hut of his favourite wife. He may, however, have besides a hut for each of his wives, a small hut for himself, but he will never sleep in it. For this purpose he goes to the huts of each of his wives in turn, or generally he sleeps in that of his favourite wife, and visits the others, whenever he is informed by the women that one of them has menstruated, then after 2 days he goes to her hut for a couple of nights.

If a woman has conceived and happens to be one who has not brought forth yet, then 3 or 4 months after conception she gets little incisions (*kuku*) made all round the waist. For this operation the patient has to sit down on a stone (*nothing else*). The operation is performed by an older woman. She uses a crooked thorn which is hooked under the skin, and where the point of the thorn lifts the skin a very tiny cut is made with a native razor. Between every cut there is a space of about ¼ of an inch. Three rows of incisions are made this way all round the waist just below the navel, the rows being also about ¼ of an inch apart. No medicine is applied.

When the skin is healed again the woman goes home for 3 days to show herself (*lero kuku*) and a goat is killed for her by her father. She returns with roasted meals flour for brewing beer and a sheep. When the beer is ready the sheep and some chickens are killed and they have a feast (*bong kuku kuku*).

After the feast the young woman gets from an older one some medicine, the mixture of leaves herbs, of which she has to take a little morning and night for one month (*nadigo mondo*).

When this month is over she gets another medicine, prepared out of cooked roots of plants (*yoeti ogolo*) which she takes morning and night until one month before giving birth.

In case a woman who is with child has committed adultery she takes a certain medicine, called *manyoni*, otherwise she will have a miscarriage or the child will be a weakling.

When the hour of childbirth has come the woman sits down on the floor of the hut naked. Even the usual string of beads is taken from her waist. A

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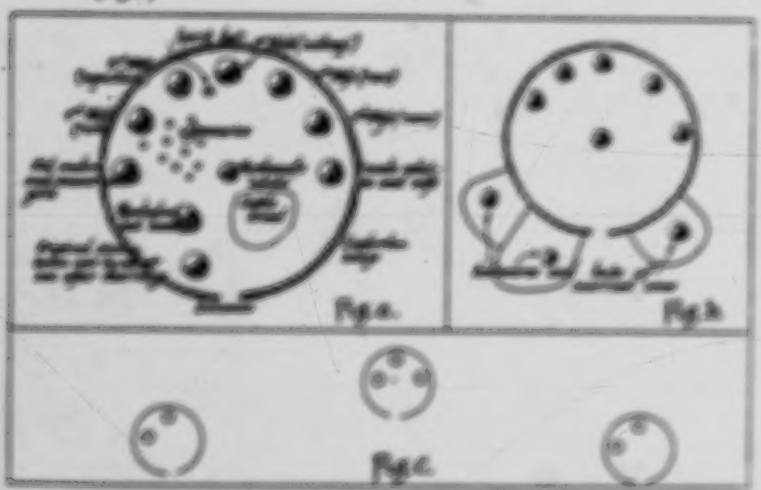
and in a number of other sociological contexts, suggests that its primary meaning is that of owner.[1] The title of the first wife is *mkuyi*, that of the second *mdala*, and of all subsequent wives *nsi*.

The diagrams below show the plan of the homestead at typical phases of the family cycle. The fuller details of Fig. *a* are omitted from the other figures. Taking the compound polygynous family as described above as an arbitrary point of departure, the cycle might be charted thus:

PHASE 1. The compound polygynous family of husband, wives, and immature offspring.

2. The eldest son marries, marries, and at last lives with his wife in the original homestead[2] but (*cimke*) while his younger brothers build a new one near to it. (Fig. *a*).



3. The eldest son eventually builds his wife a hut of her own outside his father's homestead hedge. His younger brothers marry and follow suit. Offspring are born to them, bringing into existence the compound polygynous grand family. (Fig. *b*.)

4. The now many subsidiary wives, gradually splitting off from the original homestead to form separate ones of their own. The head of the original homestead eventually dies, his widows are taken over by their stepsons or brothers-in-law, and the old homestead is in course of time deserted. There is now an extended family, with the eldest or eldest of the third man's sons as head, the ever' homesteads now each having reached phase 1 of the cycle. (Fig. *c*.)

The head of the compound family is, of course, a member of each of its component elementary families, but the fact that he is common to them all gives each a certain independence in relation to him as well as to one another. The elementary family

[1] It is the possessive form of *mwe* which has the meanings 'owner', 'father', 'guardian'

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is a big thing. When we get some money, I shall ask my husband for a better house. We are in the way of progress now, but there is another thing: the Government must help us with our water, we need a scheme to bring it—that is the biggest thing.'

It is often said that women are the most conservative, and in some ways perhaps this may be so—especially in regard to marriage customs; but it struck me, almost everywhere I went, that it is the women who are most anxious to see these basic land reforms brought in, the men who oppose—not the old men so much as the younger, educated ones who have been to cities. Africa so often seems to reverse the expected order of things.

At any rate, there was no doubt of what these women thought about land reform. It is they, after all, the cultivators, the workers, who know where the shoe pinches, and no wonder they are out of patience with those young men of the towns who, while crying for political freedom, do their best to deny to their own women that measure of relief from hard, grinding toil which land consolidation and enclosure can afford.

Among the Luo, everything is done by clans—extended families would be a more correct term. This group is called the *jokakowo* and consists of all the descendants of one grandfather. They hold their land in common and each individual, as he marries, is allocated a *shamba* by the *ligwe*, the land elders. In time he probably inherits cultivation rights over other pieces from various mothers, uncles and cousins, and that is how fragmentation arises. All grazing land is held in common, as among all other tribes.

The *jokakowo* system is at once a strength and a weakness, from a modern point of view. Livestock improvers regard it as an unmitigated curse.

'All the members of the group must agree to any sale of stock by any individual,' a vet told me. 'That makes de-stocking almost impossible, if only out of bloody-mindedness.' The livestock picture generally is a gloomy one. 'We are still trying to get across one or two of the most basic principles, such as dipping or spraying against ticks. Among the Kipsigis,